

UNDERSTANDING TITHING PART 3

Two weeks ago we began the discussion on Understanding Tithing. In Part 1, we discovered why Christians can't tithe according to the book of Deuteronomy or Malachi - we're not under the Law. In Part 2, we examined the rationale behind tithing. We concluded tithing is elective in the New Testament. It is not compulsory. If you've not been following or need to refresh your memory, please go to www.myilluminate.com/understanding-tithing-part-1/, www.myilluminate.com/understanding-tithing-part-2/ to read or download for FREE. In this third part of Understanding Tithing, we shall be digging deep.

The greatest casualty of the debate over tithe is the very reason the narratives were included in the Bible in the first place. The essence of the narratives is the priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Hebrews 7 & 8). Those narratives on tithing point to him. Tithing has implications that go to the very root of Christianity. Those who focus on only the economics miss out on the purport.

Tithing began with Abraham. He tithed the spoils of war from the defeat of the Gang of Four - Amraphel, Arioch, Kedorlaomer and Tidal. These kings raided Sodom and carted off Abraham's nephew, Lot as a prisoner of war. Abraham went after them, defeated them and rescued Lot. He recovered significant loot from the military expedition. Abraham then gave a tenth of that loot to a priest named Melchizedek. That was the first tithe in the Bible.

Tithe antagonists insist on four issues from this story:

1. They insist Abraham tithed only once and therefore there is nothing like continuous tithing.
2. They insist Abraham tithed from war and so we should only tithe our "conquests."
3. They insist Abraham did not tithe from personal assets but from the assets of the king of Sodom.
4. They insist it wasn't Abraham who tithed but Abram. This presumably means it wasn't the covenanted entity that tithed.

There are also technical arguments over whether you pay tithe or give tithe. But all these nit-pickings miss the point. These arguments are of no theological or redemptive value. They're easily dealt with from a cursory reading of Hebrews 7. For example, Hebrews 7 does not recognise dichotomy of Abraham/Abram in its analysis. See Hebrews 7:1-2. All God wanted to establish in Genesis 14 was the fact Abraham paid tithe to Melchizedek, period! That factuality of that tithe is the pointer to the priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Hebrews 7)

As enumerated in Part 1 of this series, there are two regimes of tithe in the Bible. The first regime is Abrahamic tithing. It is elective. Abraham paid tithe electively. No one compelled him to. The second regime of tithe is the regime of the Law (Ten Commandments). It's a regime of mandated giving. God mandated the Israelites to tithe. Because this tithing was a law, we shall call this regime legislative tithing. Now, ordinarily these two regimes of tithe have nothing in common. They have different hues and provenance. But the two regimes are linked in the New Testament. The New Testament teaches about tithe.

Abraham, as we noted, gave tithe to Melchizedek. Melchizedek the Bible says, wore a double cap. He was a priest-king, an hyphenated entity. We're told he is a type of our Lord Jesus Christ – Hebrews 5:6. Melchizedek told Abraham that his military conquest and the loot recovered were facilitated by God. (Genesis 14:19-20) Which means Abraham tithed in acknowledgement of grace and in worship. He gave a tenth of spoils of war to Melchizedek.

Interestingly Melchizedek brought communion when he met Abraham. They broke bread. The breaking of bread (communion) by Melchizedek and Abraham was a pre-enactment of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus is our sacrificial lamb and sin offering. (Hebrews 10, 1 Peter 1:18-19) We access his sacrifice through communion. As it were, Abraham had a foretaste of salvation through the communion with Melchizedek.

The regime of tithing under the Law however had a different rationale. Tithing under the law was inaugurated as a political solution to the issue of state creation. Israel had twelve tribes, the tribes were allocated land except the Levites. God declared he was their inheritance. (Numbers 18:20) In order to compensate the Levites, God legislated that all the tribes must pay tithe to the Levites. (Numbers 18:20-24) But tithing under the Law of Moses was not just about political resolution. It was welfarist as well. It was a government program for the poor, and it also focused on the state of being, health and happiness of the tithe payer.

As we can see, the two regimes of tithing couldn't be any more different. Yet the Bible says they're linked. That link between the two is found in the Book of Hebrews. Hebrews 7 & 8 to be precise. Hebrews 7 gives a recount of the meeting between Abraham and Melchizedek and then proceeds to analyse the genetic implication of the tithe: "A person might even say that Levi (the father of the priestly tribe) himself,

who received tithes, paid tithes through Abraham (the father of all Israel and all who believe), for Levi was still in the loins (unborn) of his forefather Abraham when Melchizedek met him.” (Hebrews 7:9-10 AMP) In essence the priesthood of Melchizedek is superior to the priesthood of Levi since Levi paid tithe to Melchizedek. “The person who has the power to give the blessing is greater than the one who is blessed.” (Hebrews 7:7) The argument therefore is that the Law of Moses which Levi represented is subordinate to grace which Melchizedek represented.

The writer of Hebrews (who many suspect is Paul) says Melchizedek was a perfect typology of our Lord Jesus Christ: “He is, first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, which means king of peace.” (Hebrews 7:2)

Concerning Jesus Prophet Isaiah had written: “He shoulders responsibility and is called Extraordinary Strategist, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” (Isaiah 9:6 NET) “He will rule on David’s throne and over David’s kingdom, establishing it and strengthening it by promoting justice and fairness.” (Isaiah 9:7 NET) So Jesus like Melchizedek is the King of Righteousness and King of Peace. Melchizedek in essence stood in the place of Jesus when Abraham paid tithe to him.

The significance of the Melchizedek/Abraham encounter is that the priesthood has been changed. The priesthood changed from the Levitical order to the Melchizedek order. (Hebrews 7:11) This is crucial for Christianity. There’ll be no Christianity without the change. Jesus would not be a high priest. He’s from the tribe of Judah not Levi. For the priesthood to be changed however the law regulating it must necessarily be changed too. (Hebrews 7:12) Jesus did not become a priest based on old laws. He didn’t qualify genetically. Jesus became a priest by the “power of a life that cannot be destroyed.” (Hebrews 7:16) It’s why the Psalmist wrote, “You’re a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.” (Psalm 110:4) Jesus became a priest “by the sheer force of resurrection life.” (Hebrews 7:16 MSG) Hallelujah!

The Bible says “the former way of doing things, a system of commandments that never worked out the way it was supposed to, was set aside,” replaced by “another way – Jesus! – a way that does work, that brings us right into the presence of God.” (Hebrews 7:15-19 MSG) We have a better covenant with God and Jesus is the guarantee of that covenant. (Hebrews 7:22)

Whether Abraham paid tithe once or not, whether it was from spoils of war or not, or whether he was Abram and not Abraham... All these have no covenantal value whatsoever. The Book of Hebrews pays no theological heed to them. Rather it tells

us all the documentations on tithing were all pointing to the eternal priesthood of Jesus. Because Jesus' priesthood is eternal, the Bible says "he's there from now to eternity to save everyone who comes to God through him, always on the job to speak up for them." (Hebrews 7:25 MSG) The tithing of Abraham is thus juxtaposed with tithing under the Ten Commandments to point to salvation by grace. No one can be saved by obeying the Ten Commandments. "The law never made anything perfect." (Hebrews 7:19 NLT)

And to buttress the fact that this whole tithing thing is really about Jesus, Hebrews 8 begins thus: "Here is the MAIN POINT: We have a High Priest who sat down in the place of honour beside the throne of the majestic God in heaven. There he ministers in the heavenly Tabernacle..." (Hebrews 8:1) It's all about Jesus! It's all about his love for us. He negotiated a new deal for us using his crucifixion as bargaining chip. He "mediates for us a far better covenant with God, based on better promises." (Hebrews 8:6) It's all about Jesus. Worship him!

Given the foregoing, it is incorrect to say tithe is not a New Testament doctrine. It is! Without tithe we have no argument for the creation of Christianity. The writer of the Book of Hebrews based his argument on it. The New Testament teaches about tithe. Only the teachings are elevated, they're not pedantic. They're deep. In Hebrews, we see the old and new converge to reveal our Saviour. Now, that's what tithing is all about!

If you'll like to receive Jesus into your life please pray this prayer: "Father I acknowledge that I am a sinner, that Jesus died for me, that you raised him from the dead. Father please forgive me. I accept Jesus today as my Lord and my Saviour. Amen."

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